

STRESS & ANXIETY AT WORK

WHY DO I FEEL ANXIOUS BEFORE WORK?

Understanding anxiety that begins before the working
day

ARTICLE 1 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



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Introduction

For some people, the anxiety begins before they've even left the house.

The alarm goes off, and almost immediately their mind starts racing.

"What if I can't cope today?"

"What if I make a mistake?"

"What if someone notices I'm struggling?"

By the time they arrive at work, their heart is racing, their shoulders are tense and they're already mentally exhausted.

If you've experienced this, you're not alone. Workplace anxiety affects people across all professions and at every level of responsibility. It isn't a sign that you're weak or incapable—it is often your mind and body responding to pressure, uncertainty or prolonged stress.

Understanding why this happens is the first step towards breaking the cycle.

What Happens in the Brain?

Anxiety is part of our natural survival system.

When your brain believes there may be a threat, it activates the body's stress response, preparing you to deal with danger. This is often referred to as the fight, flight or freeze response.

The difficulty is that the brain doesn't only respond to physical danger. It can also react to psychological threats, such as fear of making mistakes, being criticised, missing deadlines or feeling unable to cope.

Your body responds as though you're facing immediate danger, even when you're simply preparing for another working day.

Signs You May Notice

Workplace anxiety can affect both your mind and your body.

You might experience:

- A racing heart before work.

Feeling sick or losing your appetite.

Difficulty sleeping before workdays.

Constant worrying about what might happen.

Muscle tension, headaches or stomach discomfort.

Feeling restless or unable to relax.

Difficulty concentrating.

Feeling emotionally overwhelmed before you've even started work.

These symptoms are genuine physical responses to anxiety, not signs of weakness.

The Anticipation Trap

One of the most exhausting parts of workplace anxiety is anticipation.

Your brain starts imagining everything that could go wrong before any of it has happened.

You may spend your commute rehearsing conversations, worrying about meetings or imagining worst-case scenarios.

Ironically, the anticipation often feels worse than the events themselves.

By the time the working day begins, you've already used a great deal of your emotional energy.

What Can Help?

While you can't always remove workplace pressure, you can reduce the impact anxiety has on your day.

Helpful strategies include:

- Focusing on the next task rather than the entire day.

Using slow breathing to calm your nervous system before entering work.

Challenging catastrophic thoughts by asking yourself, "What evidence do I have that this will happen?"

Preparing for important meetings without trying to control every possible outcome.

Taking regular breaks throughout the day.

Speaking with your manager if workplace pressures have become unmanageable.

Seeking professional support if anxiety is persistent or significantly affecting your wellbeing.

Small changes, repeated consistently, often have a greater impact than searching for one perfect solution.

Reflection

Ask yourself:

"Am I responding to what's happening today, or to what my anxious mind thinks might happen?"

Learning to notice this difference can help reduce the power that anticipation has over your working day.

Key Takeaway

Feeling anxious before work is more common than many people realise. Anxiety prepares your body to deal with perceived threats, but when that response becomes activated every working day, it can become exhausting.

Understanding your anxiety isn't about getting rid of it overnight. It's about recognising what's happening, responding with compassion and gradually building the confidence that you can cope with whatever the day brings.